



School strategy at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) Kindergarten as an inclusive school

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Abstract

Inclusive education in early childhood settings plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to learning and supporting optimal child development. Although inclusive education is strongly supported by national policies in Indonesia, its practical implementation at the early childhood education level remains challenging, particularly in adapting curriculum and strengthening family school collaboration. This study is urgent in exploring how inclusive principles are implemented in a real school context where teachers do not have formal special education backgrounds but are required to serve diverse learners. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach conducted at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS). Data were collected through indepth interviews with the principal and teachers, classroom observations, and analysis of institutional documents, including anecdotal records, connecting notebooks, and children's developmental reports. Data were analyzed thematically to examine curriculum and learning adaptations, family empowerment strategies, and institutional support. The findings indicate that Elmafaza IBS applies an adapted curriculum through differentiated instruction, development based grouping, and systematic child documentation. Teachers demonstrate inclusive practices supported by continuous training and principal supervision. Family empowerment is strengthened through transparent communication, parental involvement in providing shadow assistants, and adherence to developmental and medical recommendations. These practices reflect effective interactions across ecological systems within the school context. In conclusion, inclusive education at Elmafaza IBS is sustained through the integration of adaptive curriculum practices, professional teacher development, and strong family collaboration, contributing to a responsive and supportive early childhood learning environment.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education; School Strategy; Family Empowerment.*

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Received 27 October 2025, Accepted 5 December 2025, Published 9 December 2025

Introduction

Inclusive education emphasizes the provision of equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or special needs, by fostering a learning culture that values diversity and mutual respect. In early childhood education, inclusion is not limited to physical access to classrooms but involves intentional efforts to identify and remove learning, social, and emotional barriers that may hinder children's participation. Through inclusive practices, every child is encouraged to engage actively in learning experiences that support cognitive, social, and emotional development. Such an approach promotes fairness, empathy, and a sense of belonging, ensuring that all children have meaningful opportunities to develop their potential within a supportive and responsive educational environment (Rahmawati & Filasofa, 2025). In Indonesia, the vision of inclusive education is reinforced through Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Ministerial Regulation Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education. These regulations mandate that all educational institutions, including early childhood education settings, provide equitable and non discriminatory educational services for every child. Schools are required to adapt their learning environments, curricula, and instructional approaches to accommodate the diverse abilities and developmental needs of learners.

By emphasizing equal access, participation, and respect for diversity, these policies serve as a legal and ethical foundation for implementing inclusive practices that support holistic child development and promote social justice from an early age (Thahir et al., 2024; Nugroho & Mareza, 2016). In Indonesia, the commitment to inclusive education is strengthened by Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Ministerial Regulation Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education. These policies affirm every child's right to receive quality education without discrimination and require schools to respond to learner diversity through adaptive educational practices. Early childhood education institutions are expected to modify curricula, learning strategies, and classroom environments to meet children's with other developmental needs. By establishing inclusion as a national priority, these regulations provide a strong legal and cultural framework that supports equity, accessibility, and respect for differences in early childhood education settings (Fatmawiyati & Permata, 2022; Rafah et al., 2025).

Despite strong policy support, the implementation of inclusive education at the kindergarten level still encounters multiple challenges. Teachers often struggle with limited competence in identifying developmental delays, designing differentiated instruction, and managing behavior variations in inclusive settings. Classrooms typically consist of children with uneven readiness levels, ranging from those who easily follow routines to those requiring individualized assistance or shadow teachers to engage meaningfully in learning activities. Moreover, parental understanding of inclusive education varies widely, influencing the consistency of home school developmental support. Research consistently highlights that early intervention is most effective when combined with strong family involvement, as parents are the primary caregivers who observe children's daily behavior and learning progress (Rani & Jauhari, 2018). These realities highlight the need for adaptive curriculum design that responds to children's diverse developmental needs, continuous professional development to strengthen teachers' inclusive competencies, and structured family empowerment programs that promote consistent collaboration between home and school in supporting inclusive early childhood education.

At Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS), these challenges are met with intentional and structured strategies designed to support diverse learners. Although the teachers primarily hold early childhood education, qualifications rather than special education backgrounds, the school provides ongoing training, in house mentoring, and exposure to inclusive teaching practices. Teachers are trained to apply differentiated learning, observe developmental milestones accurately, and utilize responsive instructional approaches grounded in children's individual needs. A strong documentation culture supports these practices. Teachers consistently maintain daily notes, developmental checklists, anecdotal records, and portfolios, ensuring that every child's progress is systematically monitored. These documents guide lesson planning, inform individualized interventions, and serve as communication tools for collaboration with families. The principal plays an active supervisory role through routine classroom observations and

document reviews, ensuring that inclusive curriculum adaptations align with school policies and pedagogical goals.

Family empowerment forms another essential pillar of inclusive practice at Elmafaza IBS. Parents express high trust in the school due to its transparent communication mechanisms, including connecting notebooks used for daily updates and recommendations, as well as accessible CCTV that allows parents to monitor classroom activities. This transparency encourages parental participation in developmental follow up at home, strengthens awareness about inclusive practices, and fosters shared responsibility between teachers and families. Parents are also encouraged to provide shadow assistant when necessary, adhere to therapeutic or medical recommendations, and conduct regular psychological or developmental check up. Through these collaborative efforts, Elmafaza IBS has cultivated a supportive, adaptive, and family centered inclusive learning environment. The combination of curriculum adaptation, teacher professionalism, strong documentation, and active parental involvement positions Elmafaza IBS as a meaningful model of inclusive early childhood education responsive to student diversity.

Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of in depth description of the school's strategy in empowering families and accommodating student diversity at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) Kindergarten. This approach is used because it is able to depict the phenomenon of inclusive education naturally and contextually based on real world experiences. The descriptive qualitative approach focuses on understanding the meaning, process, and dynamics that occur in the implementation of inclusive learning from the perspective of the research subjects, namely the principal and teachers. This study emphasizes the interpretation of data sourced from interviews, observations, and documentation to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood education institutions (Darma & Harsiwi, 2025). The research was conducted at Elmafaza IBS Kindergarten at Klaten, Central Java. This school was selected purposively because it is characterized as an early childhood education institution that implements an inclusive learning system that involves children with special needs and regular children in one learning environment. The research informants consisted of the principal and class teachers selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering that both have a deep understanding and direct experience related to the implementation of inclusive education at the school.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself, who acted as planner, collector, analyst, and interpreter of data. The researcher's presence in the field served to understand the concrete context of inclusive education implementation at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) Kindergarten. Data collection was conducted through in depth interviews with the principal and teachers, as well as direct observation of learning activities and child interactions within the school environment. Observations were conducted in a nonparticipatory manner, meaning the researcher simply observed without using a formal observation sheet, with the aim of obtaining a natural picture of the implementation of inclusive activities. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources, namely by comparing interview results from two informants (the principal and a teacher) and confirming findings through direct observation. Furthermore, researchers conducted member checks with informants to ensure the interpretations matched actual conditions on the ground.

Results and Discussion

Curriculum and Learning Adaptation

The implementation of inclusive education at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) is strengthened through a curriculum model that integrates national early childhood education standards with an adaptive, needs based curriculum. This flexible approach allows teachers to design learning experiences that respond to children's diverse cognitive, social, emotional, and sensory characteristics. Learning objectives, methods, and assessment strategies are adjusted based on individual developmental profiles, ensuring that each child can participate meaningfully in classroom activities. By prioritizing developmental appropriateness and responsiveness to

individual needs, the curriculum supports inclusive practices that foster engagement, independence, and holistic growth within a safe and supportive early childhood learning environment. This approach aligns, which emphasize that adaptive curriculum design is essential for realizing inclusion at the kindergarten level. One of the core strategies implemented by Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) is development based grouping, in which children are organized according to their developmental levels rather than chronological age. This approach allows learning experiences to be better matched to children's readiness, abilities, and emotional needs. Development based grouping helps reduce pressure and anxiety, particularly for children with special needs, as they are able to learn alongside peers with similar competencies. This strategy aligns with research findings showing that development based grouping enhances children's comfort, self confidence, and opportunities for positive social interaction, thereby supporting a more inclusive and supportive early childhood learning environment. This strategy ensures that learners move at their own pace without feeling left behind (Margiyanto, 2022).

In daily learning activities, differentiated instruction is consistently applied. Teachers adapt learning methods, instructional media, and task difficulty levels to align with each child's abilities and developmental needs, ensuring meaningful participation, reducing learning barriers, and supporting optimal engagement in inclusive early childhood classrooms. Adaptive teaching skills are a critical component of professional competence in inclusive teachers (Wulandari et al., 2024). Observations at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) indicate that teachers consistently use contextual and concrete learning media to support inclusive learning.

Instructional tools such as picture cards, self made educational props, and simple play based games are integrated into daily activities to help children better understand concepts and stay engaged. These materials are intentionally designed to be accessible to children with varying developmental abilities, including those with special needs. The use of hands on and visually rich media allows children to learn through direct experience, while also encouraging interaction and communication. This practice supports research highlighting the importance of creative and adaptable teaching media in inclusive kindergarten settings. (Pangestuti & Darsinah, 2023). Elmafaza IBS also implements several structured documentation strategies to ensure continuity in children's learning:

1. Daily connecting notebooks to synchronize school home communication.
2. Anecdotal records for each child, enabling teachers to monitor developmental progress and identify needs promptly.
3. Shadow teachers for children with special needs to ensure they receive individualized support.
4. Semester based progress reports and special development reports designed as a reference for future primary school teachers.

These practices reflect the importance of systematic monitoring in inclusive education, as emphasized by scholars who argue that effective inclusion requires strong school management capable of coordinating curriculum implementation, documentation, and instructional supervision. At the early childhood level, consistent monitoring ensures that learning adaptations align with children's developmental needs and inclusive goals. Through well organized documentation, regular supervision, and reflective evaluation, schools are able to identify challenges early and provide timely support for teachers and learners. Such management practices contribute to the sustainability of inclusive education by fostering accountability, instructional quality, and a shared commitment to meeting the needs of all children in diverse learning environments (Pangestuti & Darsinah, 2023).

The use of shadow teachers at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) demonstrates the critical role of specialized support personnel in inclusive early childhood education. Shadow teachers provide individualized assistance that helps children with special needs participate more fully in classroom activities, particularly when gaps exist in therapy services or learning readiness. Their presence supports emotional regulation, task engagement, and social interaction, while also assisting classroom teachers in implementing differentiated instruction. By offering targeted support within the natural learning environment, shadow teachers help reduce barriers to participation and promote continuity between therapeutic interventions and daily learning experiences, contributing to more effective and responsive inclusive education practices (Asdhar & Yoenanto, 2025).

The inclusive learning environment at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) strongly emphasizes social emotional development by fostering empathy, collaboration, and spiritual values. Children with and without special needs engage together in shared activities such as cooperative play, group prayer, and memorizing short surahs, creating meaningful opportunities for interaction and mutual respect. These inclusive practices support the development of positive peer relationships, emotional awareness, and social responsibility. Through daily inclusive interactions, children learn to appreciate differences, help one another, and build a sense of belonging. This confirms that inclusive classrooms enhance social skills and empathy among both children with special needs and their typically developing peers (Mulyati et al., 2024). Integrating Islamic values such as *rahmah* and *'adl* supports the conclusion, that inclusive Islamic based education contributes to children's character development (Nadhiroh & Ahmadi, 2024).

Family Empowerment Strategies

Family involvement is considered a central component in the inclusive education system at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS). Emphasize that active parental participation accelerates adaptation, increases children's confidence, and strengthens teacher-family-child emotional bonds (Fitriani et al., 2024). At Elmafaza IBS, parental engagement is systematically structured through regular training, communication routines, and collaborative decision making. Parents are encouraged to take an active role in supporting their children's development through:

1. Providing shadow teachers independently when needed, ensuring continuity between school and home support.
2. Routine consultations with psychologists, especially for behavioral, emotional, or developmental follow up.
3. Monitoring children's growth and developmental milestones, following recommended assessments.
4. Complying with doctors' or therapists' recommendations, such as speech therapy, Occupational therapy, or behavior interventions.

Emphasized that parents' understanding of inclusive education influences their ability to make appropriate educational decisions and ensure consistent support at home (Sari, 2020). Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) strengthens parents' capacity through regular parent training sessions conducted every two months. These programs focus on building positive communication between parents and children, effective caregiving strategies, and practical skills for supporting children with special needs at home. The training sessions provide parents with a better understanding of child development and inclusive education principles, enabling them to respond appropriately to their children's needs. Through guided discussions and experience sharing, parents gain confidence in implementing consistent support strategies at home. This approach helps align home practices with school interventions, ensuring continuity in children's developmental support and strengthening collaboration between families and the school. School parent partnerships significantly improve the alignment of home and school practices (Suminar & Widyastuti, 2022).

That most parents respond positively to inclusive education, although a few still require emotional guidance to fully accept their child's condition. This phenomenon that limited parental literacy in inclusive education remains a major barrier in many regions (Putri et al., 2025). Therefore, Elmafaza IBS maintains persistent communication, regular dialogues, and persuasive approaches to bridge understanding gaps.

Digital communication further strengthens collaboration between Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) and parents through the use of school home communication platforms, including chat groups and photo sharing channels. These digital tools enable teachers to provide regular updates on children's learning activities, behavior progress, and developmental milestones. Parents can respond promptly, ask questions, and clarify guidance given by teachers, fostering two way communication and shared understanding. The use of digital parenting platforms supports transparency and consistency between home and school practices. By facilitating timely information exchange, digital communication enhances parental engagement, supports continuity of learning interventions, and contributes to more effective collaboration in inclusive early childhood education settings (Latif et al., 2023).

Parents' trust is strengthened by the school's commitment to providing disability friendly facilities that support children's safety, accessibility, and comfort. Adaptive learning spaces and inclusive facilities demonstrate the school's seriousness in meeting diverse needs, reinforcing parents' confidence in the school's ability to support inclusive learning effectively (Novianti et al., 2023). At Elmafaza IBS, this is visible through adapted learning media, supportive therapy tools, and safe learning spaces. Even though therapy facilities and experts remain limited an issue, the school compensates through collaboration with external volunteers and professionals, as recommended (Asdhar & Yoenanto, 2025; Fitria et al., 2024). Overall, the family empowerment strategies at Elmafaza IBS are in line with conclusions, which emphasize that parents' understanding and active involvement are foundational to successful inclusive education (Qistan & Swandi, 2024). Through consistent collaboration, training, emotional support, and shared responsibility, Elmafaza IBS demonstrates an effective model of school family synergy in inclusive kindergarten settings.

Integrating Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The implementation of inclusive education at Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) aligns closely with the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which conceptualizes child development as the result of dynamic interactions across multiple environmental layers. At the microsystem level, the classroom and family serve as the child's immediate developmental environments. The adapted curriculum, differentiated instruction, and individualized documentation practiced by teachers directly shape children's learning experiences, communication skills, and social interactions (Faatinisa et al., 2024). Similarly, consistent parental engagement, through connecting notebooks, routine check ups, and the provision of shadow assistants, strengthens the child's emotional security and ensures developmental continuity across home and school settings (Indah et al., 2024).

The mesosystem, which represents the connections between microsystems, is reflected in the strong collaboration built between teachers and parents. Daily communication, transparent monitoring through CCTV, and scheduled parent trainings create a reciprocal relationship where both parties align expectations and reinforce developmental interventions. This synergy ensures that skills model at school are supported at home, making learning adaptations more effective and sustainable. The commitment of parents to follow teachers' recommendations demonstrates the strength of this mesosystemic interaction. These dynamics align, who emphasize that strengthening collaboration between parents and schools is essential for effective transitions. Their study, grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, demonstrates that children adapt more smoothly when the expectations and interventions in the home and school microsystems are harmonized. They further observe that limited communication often increases parental anxiety, reinforcing the need for structured and transparent communication channels (Nibrosurrahman & Kurniati, 2025).

Beyond this, the ecosystem, environments that indirectly affect the child plays a significant role in shaping inclusive practices at Elmafaza IBS. The school's administrative decisions, teacher training programs, and supervisory mechanisms implemented by the principal create structural conditions that support inclusive learning. Although children do not directly participate in administrative processes, the policies and resource allocations made at this level determine the quality of instruction, availability of shadow teachers, and access to developmental assessments. These institutional factors subtly yet significantly influence children's developmental outcomes (Rivana et al., 2024).

At the macrosystem level, national educational policies such as the 2003 National Education Law and the 2009 Inclusive Education Regulation provide the cultural and regulatory framework that legitimizes and guides inclusive practices. These policies shape societal expectations regarding diversity, equity, and children's rights to education, creating a broader value system that supports the school's inclusive mission. The emphasis on empathy, respect, and non discrimination in early childhood education also reflects cultural beliefs that influence both school practices and parental attitudes toward inclusion (Khotimah, 2009).

Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, it becomes evident that the success of inclusive education at Elmafaza IBS is not solely the result of classroom strategies, but rather the outcome of coordinated interactions across multiple ecological layers. The alignment between

school structures, teacher practices, family engagement, and broader policy frameworks creates a holistic environment that supports the diverse developmental needs of young children in inclusive settings.

Conclusion

This study shows that Elmafaza Islamic Baby School (IBS) has been able to implement meaningful curriculum and learning adaptations that respond to the developmental needs of young children in an inclusive setting. Through differentiated activities, ongoing observation, individualized learning records, and regular supervision, teachers are able to support children with varied learning styles and readiness levels. Although the teaching staff mainly come from early childhood education backgrounds rather than special education, the professional development and mentoring they receive enable them to apply inclusive strategies with confidence. These efforts demonstrate that high quality inclusive practices can be achieved when early childhood teachers are given structured guidance and responsive curriculum tools.

The findings also highlight the central role of family involvement in strengthening inclusive education for young children. Elmafaza IBS builds strong home school partnerships through open communication, daily connecting notebooks, and transparent monitoring systems such as CCTV. Parents are encouraged to take part in their child's learning journey by providing shadow assistants when needed, attending workshops, and following developmental or therapeutic recommendations. This close cooperation ensures that children receive consistent support both at home and in school, which is essential during early childhood when learning and behavior develop rapidly.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to interpret the findings, it is clear that successful inclusion at Elmafaza IBS is shaped by interactions across multiple layers of the child's environment. The microsystem of the classroom and family, the mesosystem connections between teachers and parents, the ecosystem of school policies and teacher training, and the macrosystem of national regulations all work together to influence children's development. This ecological perspective shows that inclusive education in early childhood is most effective when supportive relationships, structures, and values are aligned. In this way, Elmafaza IBS serves as a model of how early childhood programs can create a nurturing, developmentally appropriate, and inclusive environment for all young learners.

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